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Three economics and mathematics majors experience real-world research opportunity through Truckers and Turnover Project

Summary: Manjari Govada '12, Tricia Steffen '11, and Chris Thorne '11, Ham Lake serve as research assistants to Stephen Burks, associate professor of economics and management, and Jon Anderson, associate professor of mathematics.

(July 21, 2009)-Training new employees requires time and money. When those employees quit soon after being hired, a company's investment reaps no reward. That inefficiency led members of the trucking industry to fund the Truckers and Turnover Project at the University of Minnesota, Morris. Headed by Stephen Burks, associate professor of economics and management, and Jon Anderson, associate professor of mathematics, the research project is providing real-world experience this summer for three Morris economics and mathematics majors: Manjari Govada '12, Shakopee Tricia Steffen '11, Lakefield and Chris Thorne '11, Ham Lake.

In the trucking industry, large numbers of carefully trained 18-wheeler drivers quit soon after they start. Burks, Anderson, and the student research assistants are exploring a method to determine which employees may be likeliest to leave employment after a short time. The group has been evaluating personality questionnaires and math and reading assessment tests administered at truck-training academies in order to identify characteristics that might indicate short-term rather than career-long employees. The project also studies characteristics that point towards driver productivity.

Govada, Steffen, and Thorne accompanied Anderson and Burks, as well as Jacqueline Johnson, chancellor of the University of Minnesota, Morris, to Green Bay, Wisconsin, to visit trucking company executives with whom they partner on the project. According to the trio, developing relationships with their professors during the trip, and throughout the project, is an important perk for conducting collaborative research with faculty. Another perk for this particular project—bragging rights after getting to try driving a fully loaded 18-wheeler at a truck-training center!

Working in Morris during the summer is “like adulthood,” says Govada, who changed her major to economics because of this research experience. The three, who prepared for serving as research assistants through a semester-long independent study course on STATA, a data analysis program, are grateful for the summer research opportunity. In a joint statement, they say: “It has made us realize that the world of economics and statistics encompasses more than just numbers rather, the work we do affects real people and their lives.”

Morris students have been involved in the [Truckers and Turnover Project](#) as research assistants since the project began in 2005.

Photo above: Tricia Steffen '11, Lakefield, Manjari Govada '12, Shakopee, and Chris Thorne '11, Ham Lake

Photo below: Manjari Govada '12, Shakopee, Stephen Burks, associate professor of economics and management, Tricia Steffen '11, Lakefield, and Chris Thorne '11, Ham Lake, not pictured—Jon Anderson, associate professor of

mathematics

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